STAGE LEFT:
A REVIEW OF *CONTINGENCY, HEGEMONY, UNIVERSALITY: CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUES ON THE LEFT*

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There is no universality which is not a hegemonic universality.

— Ernesto Laclau[1]

One has to admire *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* for trying to jumpstart the Left out of its current paralysis, which Slavoj Žižek describes as the Left's unwritten prohibition on political projects (127) and as "the (im)possibilities of radical thought and action today" (91).[2] The book stages a respectful dialogue among Žižek, Judith Butler, and Ernesto Laclau to dramatize what the book's triumvirate of authors calls their "anti-totalitarian, radical democratic project." Any declaration of solidarity by theorists of a progressive bent is sure to be welcomed by the Left, and the project of a radical democracy certainly warrants the exposition the book means to provide — especially now that recent electoral events in the United States make some stodgy democratic institutions appear radical indeed.

The book is a gamble, though. First, it begs to be measured by the theoretical range of its three authors, which is only paralleled by the differences in their personalities. Their prefatory notes say the book hopes to "establish the common trajectory of our thought," then add that the results reflect "the different intellectual commitments we have." While they reiterate their mutual concord, it is hard to discount the notoriously dissimilar styles of the authors, which are perhaps not unrelated to deeper degrees of theoretical and political differences. The unruffled style of Butler mirrors her inclination to mediate and reconcile incompatibles; the careful logic of Laclau convinces us that social change is both imminent and immanent; while Žižek's passionate impatience for political action uses earthy examples that cannot help but stir us up. The talk of solidarity also runs against the grain of the reader's curiosity, which is more likely to be piqued by the issues that divide them than by the rhetoric that unites them.

What links the authors together nonetheless deserves our fullest attention. Surprisingly (given how much out of favor he fell in the mid-twentieth century) Hegel — not Marx — is what most generally ties them

to each other, particularly Hegel's labor of the negative. This return to Hegel constitutes one of the book's larger stories. So does the trio's common turn from Marxist views to the refinement that Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony brought to the analysis of ideology. The latter is less surprising than the Hegelian return, since Ernesto Laclau has long drawn on the Italian's anti-fascist thinking for his own work with Chantal Mouffe. Finally, there is the authors' shared focus on what is broadly "postmodern" theory, a general rubric that covers theories that broke openly with Marx (e.g., Foucault), inherently apolitical theories that nonetheless found a certain reception on the Left (e.g., Saussure, who was enthusiastically embraced by the first generation of Russian revolutionaries). Yet what is really at issue here is integrating Lacanian psychoanalysis and poststructuralism (which all these authors have previously used to amplify their positions) into Leftist discourse. Because the Left politics of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism are not obvious, I suspect that the reader will need to keep working away at the book (which requires passage through densely self-referential argumentation) to reach an assessment of the contribution to radical democracy.

Altogether, it is not an easy book to respond to simply. I have decided therefore to take the title seriously, and to read it with the intention of grasping both the overall effect of the book and engaging what each theorist and each theory may be bringing to the question of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis for the Left.

HEGEMONY

Let me take up Gramscian *hegemony* and *counter-hegemony* first. Gramsci originated the theory of hegemony in his fateful encounter with Italian Fascism and its "new" way of achieving political dominance. Hegemony for Gramsci was the process whereby the ruling class, to advance its own political ends, subtly guided the ruled classes, covertly dominating their most inward percep-tions and distorting their intimate, everyday relations. Through hegemonic practices, the ruling classes entrenched their position of power. Counter-hegemony is the practice of strategic resist-ance on the part of the ruled class to hegemonic power. One might recall the way Stendhal depicted *Restauration* France in *The Red and the Black*.[3] The overt politics of the reactionary nobles in the novel usually run aground, but they succeed quite well in reacquiring ruling status and come to redominate the formerly revolutionary classes by imposing their own manners and mores on them as ideals. Since their former lordly privileges were severely curtailed under the Charter (the new constitution), the nobles thus hegemonically attain their ends by these new political means. (I apologize for my simplified description of Gramsci's brilliant amendment to Marxist theory, but I feel the need to do so because *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* complicates the concept in so many ways.)

Hegemony in Laclau: The most programmatic treatment of hegemony is Ernesto Laclau's. As he has done elsewhere, Laclau diligently updates Gramsci for postwar, post-Marxist Europe — and for postmodern theory. Laclau displaces earlier ideas of who and what the "ruling class" is (e.g., the nobles, the bourgeoisie) and what the ruled or potentially counter-hegemonic class is (for Gramsci it was the Southern Italian peasants, whereas for Marx it was the urban proletariat). More crucial than these context-driven substitutions, Laclau's view is that *class conflict* itself is no longer the central social antagonism it was for Marx and Gramsci. After all, the *state* has mutated, and in Gramsci hegemonic power over *civil* society was needed only to secure *political* control over the state, which in turn reinforced ruling class hegemony. Historical circumstances (such as the formation of the EU and global capital) have obviously altered the internal and external contours of "the state," and the function and location of hegemony must correspondingly shift, too.

For Laclau hegemony nevertheless remains an indispensable theoretical and practical tool for democracy. Hegemony indirectly serves structural social change through its differential operations: it produces a requisite "third dimension" to socio-political existence (56) without which there is no "production of tendentially empty signifiers" (57) to undo (however provisionally) fundamental social antagonisms. Even though hegemonization has never really eradicated a single social antagonism, it permits the social order to embed a permanently open place, unconditioned, for counter-hegemonization to occupy. As "the representation of an impossibility," hegemony keeps open a division between universal and particular: "while maintaining the incommensurability between the universal and particulars, [it] enables the latter to take up the representation of the former" (56-57). Hegemony surpasses (while being modeled on) class division and its role is to lay the foundations for future social change.

Hegemony in Butler: Judith Butler's adoption of Gramscian hegemony is quite unlike Laclau's. Butler takes issue with the divisions, oppositions, and universals Laclau thinks crucial to the concept of hegemony (and crucial to social order itself). Butler repudiates hegemony structured as division (class division for Gramsci; universal/particular division for Laclau), and prefers a hegemony that forms two faces of a single coin, that is, it operates within the bounded sphere of discourse. For Butler, social and class antagonisms are not merely historically *dépassés*; they are quite likely the root of social disorders. It is almost wholly on a pragmatic basis then, that Butler values hegemony — for how it can be used to consolidate Left gains and/or contest Left losses.

Why does Butler resist division and opposition, which are (for Rousseau, Hegel and certainly for Laclau) the engines that drive social history? Adapting Gramsci in a synchronic, Foucauldian way, Butler extends hegemony to include anything that holds sway over the *person* (not just as a member of a class). In Butler hegemony assumes the guise of "regulatory apparatuses" (157), such as the various agencies of national and international governance, censorship boards, and

even at one point, "intellectuals" (148). These regimes of power are not fixated in any one faction or group but coterminous with social order itself. Butler locates hegemonic power in social ideals (norms), *a prioris* that impose identifications that are reproduced in the unconscious (13; 279). These internalized norms are generated by tricks of linguistic opposition, meaning-effects produced wholly by language's differential operations (153). Yet they function hegemonically to shape "citizen-subjects in the domain of representation" (14).

Language is for Butler the generative site not only of hegemony but also of counter-hegemony. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices are not a matter, *à la* Laclau, of generating new, even contestatory empty signifiers, but of restructuring and subverting old ones. At the end of Butler's second intervention, "On Competing Universalities," she writes: "The task will be not to assimilate the unspeakable into the domain of speakability in order to house it there, within the existing norms of dominance, but to shatter the confidence of dominance, to show how equivocal its claims to universality are, and… track the break up of its regime" (179).

Butler's program is apolitical viewed from the standpoint of traditional politics: there are no warring factions, no struggles between politicized groups; there is only aggression toward regimes of power. Her program statement above will undoubtedly sound more than a bit Nietzschean (the transvaluation of all values) to Marxists and more than a bit over-general for radicals to whom she offers few pointers on where to aim their insurgent energies. (The generality of this quotation put me in mind of a journalistic comment I once read on Butler's writing in *Lingua Franca* complaining that it has "no neighborhood, no nation, no epoch." This struck me, of course, as not specific to Butler's style but to the lifestyle-bans capitalism increasingly puts us under.)

What is "Left" about hegemony for Butler? Can she be attacked for plunging hegemony's roots so deep into language only in order to skirt the problem of class and the divisions it brings? No, it is the other way around. Like Laclau, Butler rejects the notion that hegemony serves particular "ruling class" interests, but she does not reject it for the same reasons as Laclau (the world-historical shift in the configuration of the state). Butler's reasoning inserts class itself into a long list of the (unfortunate) effects of the linguistic "power regime" that arbitrarily structures personal and social identifications. Her partial inventory of the choices imposed on us by language includes those that "separate the person from the animal"; "distinguish between two sexes to craft identification in the direction of an 'inevitable' heterosexuality and ideal morphologies of gender"; and produce "tenacious identifications and disavowals in relation to racial, national and class identities" (153).

It may take the reader a moment to realize that Butler isn't simply, like Laclau, elasticizing hegemony to fit changed sociopolitical circumstances. Butler's unexcited prose is really quite disproportionate to her inflation of the concept and the destruction she is willing to inflict on all claims to universality by its means. Hegemony becomes coextensive (coeval, perhaps?) with

language, the source of all power — not just ruling class power — to shape and subordinate personal identities through naming and interpellation. Lest we imagine that language's pan-social force might thus lead her to political quietism (as Nussbaum has suggested[4]), Butler makes it plain that the destructive effects of language and ideal identification are to be met militantly, with "disidentificatory resistance" (150-153).[5] "The struggle to think hegemony anew is not quite possible…without inhabiting precisely that line where the norms of legitimacy…break down" (178). Language users must deploy language to resist its destructive effects. In the round world of Butler's discursive power (and the social field enclosed by it), the politics of hegemony involves the fact that it inevitably confronts its own counter-hegemonic face.

While Butler's theory is complex, her political vision is extraordinarily simple — this may be the basis of her popular appeal. She detaches counter-hegemony from class and frees it to circulate and operate at any point in the total social field, though its value is surely highest at a local level where "shatter[ing] the confidence of dominance" would be most visible. (I could picture it at work in small social circles but couldn't imagine it for large-scale national or international politics.) Still, Butler has more axiomatic concerns in sight. Observe what Butler once wrote about gender-identity: "Consider the medical interpellation which…shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or 'he,' and in that naming, the girl is 'girled,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender."[6] It is not impossible to extrapolate from her disjoining gender (a specific difference) from sex (an opposition) to see how discursive counter-hegemony might begin at birth. Parents and medical personnel might refuse to label a newborn a "he" or a "she," and instead label it an "it."

Counter-hegemony works for Butler primarily at this highly *personal* level; it appears to affect deeper *political* levels only by implication. Of course, Butler warns against thinking in "levels,"[7] and thus she meets one of the originating impulses of the New Left: to make the personal the political. Left political action no longer consists of finding out just exactly how some specific "they" is ruling you (as member of a socioeconomic class) and then acting against "them" in concert with others to foil their control. For Butler, Left political action is now a matter of realizing how "regimes of power" (151) compel us internally "to consent to what constrains us" (29), a matter of throwing off that compulsion, presumably by what the 60's called "getting your head on straight." In resisting social interpellations and imposed identifications, we spontaneously make a political statement — and from what I see in Butler's essays here, it appears to be perhaps the only political pronouncement we can still make.[8]

Hegemony in Žižek: For Žižek, something else enters the picture of hegemony. Unlike Laclau and Butler, Žižek's Old Left concerns have not entirely faded away under postmodern conditions. The social field to which he rearticulates Gramscian hegemony has little in common with the monologic one of Butler, and only slightly more so with Laclau's social structuring-in-process.

Žižek agrees with Laclau that hegemony adds a crucial "third dimension" to social and political life indispensable to their analysis. Nevertheless, Žižek's hegemony mirrors his psychoanalytic commitment to "levels," that is, to the fact of irreconcilable conflicts. In Žižek's Lacanian eyes, hegemony represents radical social antagonism "through the particular differences internal to the system" of a social field — class, race, and so on. But it also additionally reveals a contingent, indirect presence that hovers eerily over all these representations. Any delineation of an "intra-social difference [within a social space]," Žižek writes, is connected umbilically to another more radical difference: "the limit that separates society from non-society" (92).

What makes Žižek insist on this limit, this radical opposition between society and what-it-is-not? While it may have something to do with Hegel's dialectic of self and not-self, I suspect it has much more (if not everything) to do with the "psychic life of power" (to borrow Butler's title, but not its spirit). Put simply, Žižek rejects the poststructural position that is content to settle with the understanding that language is the origin of society (which no one can doubt), and that dismisses (like Derrida in *Of Grammatology)* the search for pre-linguistic origins as theological. Žižek poses a still more radical question: that of the origin and the cause of the drives. Though drives are a-social, they arise not from nature but from the very differential, linguistic structuring of the social — from its symbolic designations, labeling, classifications, and so on. Žižek's "limit" is quite a different one from the sensible limits deconstruction draws around language so as to be able to enjoy a definitive plunge into the linguistic medium. Žižek is not bracketing the (non-linguistic) symbolic, but confronting it. He thus opens up a political horizon quite unlike Butler's and Laclau's discursive domain. Instead, Žižek looks to what happens when language (the symbolic) fails to maintain hegemony over itself — that is, when the symbolic, society, and language are threatened from within.

The limit Žižek inscribes between society and non-society is not just a variable border, but a determinate one that marks where the symbolic-social begins and where it ends. Žižek's limit is an *internal limit* — the disturbing point where the social self stops and the drives begin, where language confronts what it can never say. This point is what Lacan called the real. The specific political interest of this Lacanian point for Žižek is that the internal limit appears simultaneously in the social situation and in the individual. The "internal limit" is not merely a question of where you stop and the other guy begins, but where you stop being you, where your self (shaped by the signifier) ends and your drives begin.[9] When this internal limit is reached, it is felt as external compulsion, emanating from "the Other."

Here, we are as far from the bounded social space of Butler as from the open-ended one of Laclau. For Žižek, radical antagonism (between the social and the not-social) can only be represented in a distorted way through the particular differences internal to the social system — in the space between the symbols, but also the space between individuals. This return of the

real gets "mapped" onto intrasocial differences ("between elements in a social space") "in the *guise of a difference*" (92). The real is thus an effect of the fundamental opposition language/not language (or social/not social or symbolic/real). But its fierce encounter with the not-symbolic adds dimensionality to the flat, imaginary representation of social classifications as mere differences. It inserts a permanent non-place into symbolic-social-linguistic articulations. It is where imaginary and symbolic distinctions come to a halt.

Žižek defines the real as hegemonic because it has the power to *insert a distortion* into the social relations shaped by symbolic articulations similar to the one Gramsci's ruling class exercised. Gramsci's political hegemony was external to civil society; Žižek's real radicalizes the distinction by having it *exceed* the merely social: a real limit is permanently sutured to the absolute nonreality (the fictionality) of the social (which has *only* a symbolic-contractual and linguistic existence and never anything more than that). Mapped onto social differences, this exorbitant real must be dealt with. Žižek has analyzed its effects in the phenomena of racism, fascism, communism, and perversion, employing both political and psychoanalytic methods.[10] Language is not a solution to it, but is a part of the problem.

It might still sound as if Žižek were pretty far removed from Old Left topics (like class conflict) here. Yet he is the one who insists that class has never actually been exorcised from political configurations: for him it is *the* specific antagonism that overdetermines the rest even today (321). Indeed, Žižek insists that we must carry on the analysis of global capitalism by determining how classes are now reconfiguring themselves under capitalism's pressures (322-23) — into symbolic, imaginary, and real fractions. How can we reconcile these directions in Žižek? I would guess that the link between Žižek's hegemonic real and his refusal to disavow class antagonism may have more to do with his embrace of the originating impulse of *democracy* than with some nostalgia for an aging Marxist theory that might ultimately be incompatible with psychoanalysis.

Brief Excursus on Class: Before I attempt to reconcile this seeming contradiction in Žižek, however, I am going to make another simplified statement of the issues, this time regarding "class." We cannot afford to forget that the feudal world was organized not by classes, but as a series of corporate social bodies (one's "estate" was one's social "being"). These were thought of as homogeneous, unified, separated, and self-enclosed. The corporatist way of organizing society came to an end (temporarily? I sometimes wonder) with the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century. These revolutions inaugurated a sense of society as "whole body," organized now only by its differentiations, which included the most crucial "difference" of all — division into classes. Corporatism had operated quite effectively by providing its members with a sense of their *natural* place and their natural birthright (although this was about the only right secured for the individual): one's estate, one's status was all. (There is always some lingering nostalgia for the general harmony that corporatist social organization seemed to offer.)

The revolutionary overthrow of the establishment (estates) in favor of membership by class now meant that one was identified with a group whose interests were *necessarily* in conflict with those of other such groups. The disharmony introduced by these divisions was further sustained by the sense that *each* member and *each* group also possessed certain inalienable *rights*. Only the conception of *universal rights* sustained the differentiated social body, preventing it from fracturing into warring components. To Marx, the necessary tension between class and universal found its first radical expression in the French Revolution. Marx also believed that Hegel modeled his abstract dialectic of universal and particular on that revolution.

Žižek, Again: Gramsci inspires us to move beyond taking Marx's class warfare too literally. Yet for Žižek, Gramscian hegemony can be exploited only if class divisions are still operative, even though now transposed from the nation to the transnational. Žižek openly chides his fellow authors for failing to contest the hegemonic practices of global capitalism and for failing to recognize it as the new ruling class that has issued the command to end all class antagonism. Žižek thus calls for a repoliticized analysis of the global economy (223; 321) by using a concept of hegemony supplemented with the resources of psychoanalysis (the power of the real). The corporate homogenization that distorts and (imaginarily) flattens social life today requires the reminder of the real to disclose its actual dimensions and to ascertain capitalism's internal limit.

Žižek seems unconcerned that we might revert to a politics of being (although he talks about how class differences are ontologized today). But he is concerned that the dissolution of class oppositions into postmodernism's proliferating particularities disavows the relation to the universal in a way that may unthinkingly subvert one of democracy's crucial supports. "Each particularity involves its own universality" (316), Žižek declares, despite his awareness that class conflict (and by extension, universality) are no longer fashionable terms of analysis. Yet his witty first chapter, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," refuses to equate democracy either with a society of *economic* class divisions, *à la* Marx, or with contemporary "post-scarcity society," in which class division is deemed irrelevant to its "multiple political subjectivities" (99).

Thus we find the following incompatibilities with respect to hegemony (and its corollary, class), which the book does not editorially clarify. The interlocutors keep us wondering just what the common project of radical democracy might actually mean. We've heard from Žižek, for example, that class antagonism covertly remains fully implicated in the advance of global capitalism today (320) and that the global economy must be repoliticized. We've heard from Laclau that traditional class antagonisms have been overtaken by the events of history, and that the task of the Left is to lay out the constitution for a social order open to change, ready to recognize and deal flexibly with perduring social antagonisms (299). From Butler, we have encountered yet a third option (the one that has gained wide currency on the American academic Left). We are to undertake, pragmatically, issue-by-issue reviews of zones of oppression to exercise our practical reason.

For example, Butler defines "Left action" as maintaining "a political culture of contestation on…issues, such as the legitimacy and legality of public zones of sexual exchange, intergenerational sex, adoption outside marriage, increased research and testing for AIDS, and transgender politics" (161; this is no "quietist"). Butler's skeptical treatment of the content of earlier analyses of regimes of power (Marx, Gramsci) stems from her sense of the power of language to injure and cure. She encourages us to focus on those places where power is arbitrarily exercised and to denounce it — as she herself does when she castigates "intellectuals" (unspecified) who "argue against non-normative sexual practices" (148) and collaborate, in effect, with state repression of gays. Note that the "issues" which draw Butler's active involvement have little or nothing to do with *social* antagonism and everything to do with false negations and unconscious disavowals at the *personal* level.

The authors' differences only magnify as the book progresses. Žižek begins by saying, "my dialogue with [his two fellow authors] relies on shared propositions" (91) and, even after their exhaustive debates, he maintains that he "fully supports Butler's political aims" (313). But his intensely politicized finish emphasizes dramatically the specific disagreements he has with Butler (and with Laclau to a milder degree) over their failure to see the persistence of Left issues not because of but despite their theories: to him, they avoidably underrate and seriously under-represent politics through their inattention to the contradictions of (or the internal limit in) socio-symbolic life. "I continue to think, in the old Marxist vein," Žižek writes, "that today's capitalism, in its very triumph, is breeding new 'contradictions' which are potentially even more explosive than those of standard industrial capitalism. A series of irrationalities immediately comes to mind…" (322).

For Žižek modern Lacanian psychoanalysis re-animates our sense of contradiction crucial to democracy and to the political critique of capitalism: "The capitalist system is…approaching its inherent limit and self-cancellation…. 'Frictionless capitalism' (Bill Gates) is turning into a nightmare in which the fate of millions is decided in hyper-reflexive speculation on futures…" (322-5). If we compare this statement with Butler's "the field of differential relations from which any and all particular identities emerge must be limitless" (31), we can then see a very real difference. In Žižek, as in Butler, there is a "personal" level, but his is inseparable from the social and the political, caught as it is in a series of contradictions: it is a subject. Butler merges personal, social, and political into a single-level self (the term she uses increasingly as the book develops).

As the book thus makes and unmakes its strange bedfellows, issue by issue, position by position, it only obliquely informs its readers about the potential political programs, actions, and outcomes of the Left theories exposited. We are left wondering where the Left is heading. Still, I want to continue to highlight the conceptual and practical distinctions in the book— not to show the Left as troubled but to draw some instruction from what troubles it.

UNIVERSALITY

I've already touched on the final term of the book's title, *universality,* and mentioned historicist skepticism regarding universal claims and universal human rights. Each author acknowledges the contemporary critique of the universal (as a ruse for imposing imperialist dictates, and so on). Nevertheless, for Laclau and Žižek the universal remains the *sine qua non* of liberatory politics.

Laclau and the Universal: Laclau recognizes Hegel's deconstruction of the universal by "a radical exclusion" (207); but for Laclau the "universal's dependency on particularity" is part and parcel of the "universalist emancipatory project" (207). For Laclau, the universal is a necessary moment of the social dialectic. Although its power has been battered by history and shattered by theory's devastating critiques, universality remains, for him, the authentic site of counter-hegemony: universality resides literally nowhere, neither in civil nor in political society. The Left's task is not to mount futile counter-hegemonic strategies but to use hegemony's universalizing resources against itself to recognize and attenuate the antagonisms endemic in society. In Laclau, hegemony paves the way for *constructing universality* (280 ff.) by creating the space/non-space of "tendentially empty signifiers."

Butler and the Universal: For Butler the dependence of the universal on the particular (which secretes the former) not only vitiates the political and liberatory claims of the universal, but the exclusions essential to it stain, contaminate, and haunt it. Butler finds it more rational to go along with fellow critics Zerilli and Scott who have sought the universal "only *in* the chain of signifiers" or in the "undecidable coincidence" between universal and particular (33).

For Butler, the reach of language is sufficient to dispense with the universal. She is frankly suspicious of the universal as the place where sterile social oppositions and fatal political antagonisms secretly meet and marry.[11] For her, hegemony has no inherent universalizing power and no need of it. Hegemony's sole usefulness lies in the extent to which it strengthens the Left's current sway over our hearts and minds, and turns its power of regulation to emancipatory ends. (I suppose this is akin to political correctness.) And hegemony for Butler is nothing other than linguistic power. Compared with the relative absolutism of language, politics and the Law are mere partial hegemonies with far less reach. Language alone ensures the power of doing and undoing: in politics, Butler tells us, "language is unsurpassable" (279). Most importantly, language is precisely not a universal.

Butler's is technically a culturalist viewpoint; and while the phenomenon of language is indeed anthropologically universal, it is always pragmatically used to distinguish one culture from another. To mediate between these two, Butler turns not to the universal but to cultural

and linguistic translation (36-37). Butler replaces the universal, once essential to the definition of democracy, with language, and it is thus extremely important for her to link language to her radical democratic project. At first this seems simple: she characterizes democracy now as a contestation over signifiers. But hers do not work the way Laclau's signifiers do, to generate the liberating, sweepingly empty force of the "Next" signifier. Butler urges instead a stoppage of the signifier-machinery: "Sometimes you have to let certain signifiers stand, assume a certain givenness at a certain moment of analysis when they become forbidden territory" (269). Energy thus retrieved from freezing the differential thrust of language is of the same kind that Beltway Hegelians, such as Francis Fukuyama, drew off from the dialectical march of history (by ending the Cold War). Like dialectical materialist oppositions, linguistic oppositions need not drive social history any longer, and Butler turns then instead toward their own undoing.

What "works" for Butler therefore is neither a progressive nor a regressive dialectic; it is a synchronic breaching of the identities formed by dialectical oppositions that opens them to "innovative misuse" by and for "those who are not authorized in advance to make use of them" (36). The merging of the linguistic with the social and the political (all subject to the counter-hegemony of tropology) renders the universal nugatory for Butler.

Žižek and the Universal: Žižek's viewpoint shares parts of both: the universal is both emancipatory, *à la* Laclau, and contaminated by the particular, *à la* Butler. However, it is precisely because it is contaminated that the universal is emancipatory. He writes, "Capital sets a limit to resignification" (223), asserting its hegemonic power to alter or even freeze social relations and displace the work of the universal. Žižek counters capital with the proposal that "the inclusions/exclusions in the hegemonic notion of human rights…can be renegotiated and redefined and the reference to universality can serve precisely as a tool that stimulates such questioning and renegotiation" (102).

Brief Excursus on the Universal: At this point, I would like to pause my review once more to recall something about the universal that seems to be falling outside the book's explicit radar. The fact that there remains such an unbridgeable difference between Butler and her co-authors with respect to *the universal* really must concern us. Especially given that those on the Left who have stuck by the dialectical method of Hegel (even critically, like Marx or Sartre) and who have disclaimed (as Butler does not) Hegel's aim of *total knowledge*, have never abandoned the universal.

After all, not long ago, if someone raised the matter of universalism and particularism in Left politics, the concepts would have seemed perfectly easy to express and particularly helpful to social democratic causes. Consider how Marx's Hegelian eyes were once trained on a minor weavers' revolt in Germany. Marx found this seemingly insignificant revolt to be of *universal* importance — not an exemplar of economic class warfare but as an exemplar of "*social* revolu-

tion." Marx said, "[E]ven though it be limited to a single industrial district, [it] affects the totality, because it is a human protest against a dehumanized life, because it starts from the standpoint of the single, real individual, because the collectivity against whose separation from himself the individual reacts is the true collectivity of man, the human essence."[12]

Social revolution, for Marx, always has a necessarily universal character. It reminds us that what lies beyond the compass of the social is the inhuman. "The *political* soul of revolution" has something of this inhuman character: it consists of "a tendency of the classes without political influence to end their isolation from the top positions in the state. Their standpoint is that of the *state,* an abstract whole, that only exists through a separation from real life.... Thus a revolution with a political soul also organizes, in conformity with its limited and double nature, a ruling group in society to society's detriment."[13] Marx's universal goes beyond class in order to reach the point where the social has encountered the non-social, the "dehumanizing." To overcome, even in one small particular instance, the dehumanizing effect of the class antagonisms in *politicized society* (class antagonisms are just social relations distorted by ruling class interests) is to access the universal *by way of the particular*. This universal is what reminds us that civil society — that is, the existence of the collective that defines us and thus makes us human[14] — must protest each and every effort to separate individuals and classes of individuals from life in common.

Simply put, we could say that the "particularity" of the weavers' revolt *creates* universality out of the very excess of its particularization, a particularization pushed to the point that it forces (social) non-being upon the weavers. So far this does not sound much different from Butler's desire to include the "excluded." But her resistance to the universal leaves an essential element unaccounted for.

When Marx speaks of a class so fully devastated, so excluded, so dehumanized, and so dispossessed that it is not merely relegated to haunting the society that denies it all standing, but is forced into becoming *the* universal, I doubt it would be very hard for anyone, philosopher or not, to miss his point. The weavers' sense of fundamental banishment from the ranks of the human results not in their spectral return or their enjoyment of a revenge of the repressed, but the reverse. It is only in realizing their exclusion from the human that the universal is born, and that the "human" can be reconstructed.

What the weavers' revolt "says" to Marx (and this is its "universal" character) is that *no one* should suffer as we are suffering. This *no one* is a critical, negative universal. It conceals no petty self-interests. It has no particular content, even though its coming into existence depends entirely on the particular that has been squeezed down to become no more than a universal shout: *"No one should have to suffer this way."* For Marx (as for others) it is this universal — which recognizes an internal obstacle to the sway of political discriminations, that recognizes the point where the social and the not-social meet — that drives all change in society, in the very society from

which it has been separated and alienated. Awareness of one's deprivation of a place in human society is the *sine qua non* of a universality that simply can never exist *within* society. I think this is very much the same as Žižek's insistence on determining a point where the social and the not-social collide.

I cannot imagine that Butler would really want to preclude in advance this power to move a self-satisfied social world off its dead center, this *no one should have to*….

And was *the universal* not also the contribution to democracy that Rosa Parks made? When Parks stood firm and refused to move to the back of the bus, was she merely saying, "Don't treat me like this because my identity as a person of color and as a woman is merely discursively imposed by racist society and thus you have no right to treat me like this just because I look to you as if I naturally belong to one or several of these categories when I know that I am free not to do so"?

No.

Rosa Parks, by her eloquent gesture, was saying that *no one* might henceforward arbitrarily be deprived of the right to be treated *as a human being* by other *human beings*. She was also saying, more concretely, that *not all* people are being treated as I am here. We might quibble, and say that "'human' is only a culturally relative distinction." But what we cannot do is use this cultural relativist stance to deflate the power of the universal or to ignore that the "humanity" to which Parks' gesture is referable means a "humanity" created wholly out of language and its *social* contract. Not just any local social contract which can easily dismiss or define her out of existence, but *the* symbolic pact — Peirce's, Rousseau's, and so on.

Marx's is a "contestatory universal" that treats individuals frozen out of social identifications not as individualized victims, but as members of a new ex-class, one *whose only existence* resides uniquely in its articulation as the universal exclamation that *no one should be forced to* and *not all are being forced to*…. Such a universal offers what nothing "in" society can: a standpoint with which to seize society *as a "whole."* A particularity cast apart from "the whole" that is bent on eliminating its particularity, miraculously grows to the size of the universe, and grasps "the whole" as a finite totality. In Marx, the *universal* is the antagonist of what Sartre calls "self-enclosed" (totalitarian) society.[15] When some particularity stands thus apart from the whole, and is alienated from it, its universality comes into being. In the case of Marx — and Parks — this apartness provides the drive for social revolution — or even simply for social change.

Classical democracy attempted to secure a permanent place for such a universal vantage point. Žižek likens its "holding the place" to the *demos* (the part of no part) that Jacques Rancière has written of, *the people* that exists nowhere: "I am tempted to claim that this shadowy existence is the *very site of political universality*: in politics, universality is asserted when such an agent with no proper place, 'out of joint,' posits itself as the direct embodiment of universality against all those who do have a place within [the] global order" (313). This universal exceeds or falls

short of every division of society into classes and every cataloguing of its members' roles. Its is the only voice that can enunciate, see, criticize, and yet still speak *for* "the whole." *The demos* is the internal limit of the whole and as the *universal* it casts its shadow over each and every social distinction. We can see this *each and every* mode (the flip side of *not-all*) in Sartre's description below. Who, before postmodern principles of uncertainty, would have failed to see the universal as nothing but its impact on smug little social circles? Sartre writes:

> If it is impossible to find in every man some universal essence which would be human nature, yet there does exist a universal human condition.... Historical situations vary; a man may be born a slave in a pagan society or a feudal lord or a proletarian. What does not vary is the necessity for him to exist in the world, to be at work there, to be there in the midst of other people, and to be moral there.... Consequently, every configuration, however individual it may be, has a universal value.[16]

Butler and the Universal, Once More: Butler quibbles with the universal in the name of the global on the same grounds Sartre quibbles with the "great maxims" of Kantian ethics: "The content [of the universal maxim] is always concrete and thereby unforeseeable; there is always the element of invention." But Sartre does not quibble with making freedom into the universal: "*The one that counts is knowing whether the inventing that has been done, has been done in the name of freedom*." Its *social realization* is obviated in advance, yet its lack of (symbolic, social, linguistic) articulation is precisely its only source of power.

Butler is prepared to universalize democracy in a completely new way, by incorporating the negative force of the universal into discursive reason. Democracy is secured, she tells us, through its resistance to actualization: it "defers realization permanently... it is essential to this practice to remain, in some permanent way unrealizable" (268). And she rejects any opposition (such as Marx's distinction between the ideality of philosophy and the actuality of the world) that prevents conflating ideality and actuality instead of "maintaining a certain distance between the ideality of the ideal and the givenness of any modes of its instantiation" (269). This conflation makes the norm (the ideal) and deviations from it the length and breadth of any social or personal bone of contention.

Butler's democracy can remain unrealized only because language is its life-blood. Language deals the original blow of idealization and then checks idealization with linguistic deviations (tropes, swerves). It unseats power and can make anyone powerful. As no one can use language without being interpreted, so no one can interpret without speaking otherwise than one intends (279).[17] Nothing exterior to the social whole delimited by language needs to exist for this ongoing, democratic redistribution of power to operate in perpetuity.

Is there a *politics* in Butler, then, in anything like its classic (Marx, Hegel, Rousseau, Gramsci) sense of a force that distorts human social relations? If there is, Butler locates it entirely in

discourse. She makes hegemony and the universal yield premiere place to language's differential structure — a structure that only language has the means to attack (with the ruses of rhetoric, irony, parody, or with the "repeatable figure," the "citation," the "circulating trope" [269]). Her final paragraph concludes: "Language will not only build the truth that it conveys, but will also convey a different truth from the one that was intended, and this will be a truth about language, its unsurpassability in politics" (279).

Given a delimited, manageable social setting (the metaphor of Aristotle's stage comes to mind), Butler's stance can work quite well. We can dispense with extra-linguistic universality if democracy is universalized. Discriminations and contradictions can be sublated as contestations over mere signifiers if democracy is hegemonic. To adapt the performative for picturing Butler's politics: we have a stage; some will get to go right on; others must wait in the wings (or on the margins, as Butler puts it). But the latter will one day be free to move to center stage. The emancipatory mechan-isms of this move are rhetorical and performative tropic deviations from the norm that (democrat-ically) will eventually grant anyone the power to alter his/her social standing.

There is no need here for a universal standpoint to leverage a democratic totality already thus composed of a dynamic freeplay in which anyone can change roles and anyone can eventually become a "star." Or is there? Butler is a *cultural* democrat who works to widen democracy's range. Still, I wonder if Butler's radical democracy is anything *more* than cultural? Might we not ask if this *performative* democracy, with its staged identifications, and re-staged universals (and quite a bit of stage business) isn't open to potential redefinition by anti-democratic abuses of language and tropology? When she says that "My understanding of hegemony is that its normative and optimistic moment consists precisely in the possibilities for expanding the possibilities for the key terms of liberalism, rendering them more inclusive, more dynamic and more concrete" (13), she seems reluctant to imagine anything but a single expanding democratic culture, one never under threat of radical dissolution or attack by some altogether alien life form. But if democracy is hegemonic, why is the Left so hesitant to promote imaginative new programs within it (which it so obviously is), since there is nothing fundamental to fear from the opposition? One wonders, that is, why Butler's democratic stage is never deeply threatened by another stage — *eine andere Schauplatz* — that might be absolutely incongruent with it. It might be time then to ask how evolved Butler's sense of the *social* really is, in light of her disinclination to recognize antagonisms and their resultant political oppositions. In her democracy you are free to change your person/*persona* by realizing that the masks society has imposed on you are arbitrary and subject to change. Yet the choice of alternative masks (*personae*, masks, metaphors) seems culture-bound, limited to a very particular, very civil, already pretty much democratic social sphere. (Žižek's frustrated critique of the diminished political setting of Butler's work is that those who wait in the wings, "excluded by the hegemonic symbolic regime," might easily be neo-Nazis rather than the disenfranchised, the disregarded … [313]. I'm

sure Butler considers this unthinkable.)

LESSONS

Whatever the limitations we might see in her social and political theory, in this book (and possibly because of those limitations) Butler seems like a winner. She is classic and engagingly serene, making the other two look, by turns, romantic, brooding, modernist, dissonant, argumentative, and above all frustrated by her decorum. Butler triumphs here the way the fluid heroes of French classical theatre triumph: by smoothly eluding definitive judgments. She parries Žižek and Laclau; she juggles multiple theoretical allegiances that refuse to add up to a singular perspective that would over-identify her with one or another theoretical stance.[18] In this, she is not just being coy and hard to pin down, for her deepest political and theoretical allegiance is to the subversion of identifiable positions through the masking and ambiguity that tropic language provides.

Her diffident style might seem ill-fitted to the dazzle of drag and the destabilized gender identities she promotes as models of subversion. But we need only remind ourselves that the neo-classical stage restricted the numbers of actors and limited the scope of its time, place, and action and that these severe stage-limits responded to a desire for circumscription in a society on the verge of revolutionary change. (One of the prime indicators of the coming change was that, off-stage, people had come to regard their social roles with distance and often horror. Jean-Jacques Rousseau described it this way: "Although everyone preaches with zeal the maxims of his profession, each prides himself on having the tone of another. The magistrate takes on a Cavalier air, the financier acts like a Lord, the Bishop makes gallant proposals; the Courtier speaks of philosophy; the Statesman of wit and letters; down to the simple artisan, who, unable to assume a different tone, dresses in black Sundays in order to look like a man of the palace."[19])

Butler's own performance — in this book — is an almost perfect illustration of her strategy for "securing democracy." Butler is unflappably poised. She avoids argumentation over specifics and serenely declines to engage in antagonistic debate. What she does do is to characterize the others' work in ways that irritate them quite a bit. In rebuttal, Laclau and Žižek each quote her more and more extensively as the book progresses — and the reverse is not the case. This casts the others in an almost hysterical light, as argumentative, defensive, quibbling over a word here or there (although in the closing chapters each regains his own footing). While this may not seem much of an achievement in the case of the exuberant Žižek, it is a monumental one in the case of the polished, logical Laclau. Butler becomes thus the *de facto* center of calm in this book. Hers is a tactical ascendancy not particularly supported by details of precise argumentation, but it is a stunningly successful performative effect. (Perhaps because American theory assimilated the postmodern attitude more rapidly than Europe did, its central discursive mannerism — the dismissal of oppositions as fruitless and irrational — comes much more naturally to Butler than

to them. Perhaps.)

Yet it is not the tactics she deploys so much as her overall hegemonic strategy that the Left must take to heart. For the concrete verbal demeanor of Judith Butler here is not a side issue; it carries the significance and the force of her position (non-position). Butler has mastered the entire spectrum of postmodern discourses that her Left European interlocutors have only selectively and often painstakingly integrated into their pieces, as in Laclau's "Structure, History, and the Political." Or else they have openly argued against them for theoretical or political reasons. Žižek is just as comprehensive as Butler — it's a Hegelian thing — but Butler's way of integrating her knowledge[20] rhetorically and performatively is distinctive, a postmodern procedure *par excellence* that encompasses structure, history, and the political at once. The number of theoreti-cal positions Butler is able to absorb, the fluidity with which she adopts and adapts positions from theorists quite opposed to each other, amounts to a virtuoso performance: Kant's *a priori* and conditions of possibilities here; Hegel's criticisms of Kant there; Foucault's entrenched opposi-tion to Freud over sexuality on one side, and Freud's insights on figurative language on the other (151). Each citation is entirely *apropos,* yet overall the effect is one of her mastery — her total knowledge.

Her aim is, of course, not to display her virtuosity, nor is it even simply to "win." What Butler becomes by using these procedures is the very figure of *mediation* itself, and this is my point. Though it was trivialized by McLuhan ("The Medium is the Message") and crowned by twentieth-century philosophy's focus on its own means of expression, it is *mediation* that has wielded the most impressive conceptual *and* political authority in our times. (Think of Reagan's "Tear down the Wall, Mr. Gorbachev"[21]: to American popular consciousness, the utterance represented the performative power that speech act theory sees in its infamous "Let the Games Begin.") It is the performative power of language used for and against itself (to which Butler resorts) that the Left must make some decisions about.[22] Watching Butler gives us strategic clues on how to operate in a newly monologic political world, and we need to heed them very, very carefully.

For, Butler's political Leftism consists in committing herself to harnessing the resources of language (rhetoric, irony, masking, ambiguity) for the purpose of eradicating the very movement of dialectical opposition itself. If once this strategy met popular demands for the end of the Cold War's "discrete blocs which vie with one another for control of policy questions" (Butler 13-14), and if it still offers a ready-to-hand recourse for destabilizing political and other forms of oppositions, we should now question whether it remains politically effective for the cause of democracy. After the fall of communism, after the political map of the world has been redrawn one-dimensionally, is this still the best way to go? Indeed, destabilizing oppositions — the postmodern procedure *par excellence* — in a one-sided political world is already starting to feel like it blocks any way out, prevents universal protest. (I think that's why so many felt relief at the Seattle demonstrations.)

Yet it's a tough sell to *act* politically if one is successful at *performing* rhetorically. Žižek's strategy has been to "up the ante" on the performative and to carry his person as if it were that explosive universalizing voice that shakes things up.

When Laclau says, "there is no future for the Left if it is unable to create an expansive universal discourse, constructed out of, not against, the proliferation of particularisms of the last few decades.... The task ahead is to sow the seed of universality, so that we can have a full social imaginary" (306), his statement carries a silent rebuke to the restrained imaginary of Butler's discourse (and the perhaps over-full Žižekian one).[23] For Butler consistently moves to freeze the dialectic just after an opposition has been stated, and just before it inevitably yields or mutates into synthesis, she stages it, then neutralizes its effects. Something vaguely unsatisfying and generic emerges from her discourse, while Žižek's, alternatively, can get so caught in engaging stories, anecdotes, and so on, that we can't always find our way back to the logic of his political discourse.

But there is one more lesson here. In this book, I felt Butler's heavy accent on mediation was one of the things that impelled Žižek (a fellow Hegelian who also subscribes to the logic of figurality, after all) to oppose her tone of reconciliation and to call instead for the Event — an Event of the magnitude of the coming of Christ — to enter the world stage. It's impossible to decouple his highly provocative statements (about forgetting the Holocaust and fears of the Gulags and of *Linksfascismus* so we can *act* and not merely *perform* politics once more) from his reaction to Butler's discourse. At first he called to my mind a teenager who wants to break with his conformist parents by means of such "shocking" statements. But then it struck me that perhaps the very strategies of containment deployed by Butler (structurally similar to those of Third-Way politicians today, or the "radical centre" that Laclau denounces) was what was driving Žižek up the wall. If the balanced, down-to-earth Laclau might prefer to split the difference, the discordance between Butler's and Žižek's approaches also drives Laclau to make strong position statements opposed to the others, as when he rejects Žižek's resuscitation of class, or turns schoolmasterish with Butler.

I then wondered how any of them would respond to the highly provocative and yet imaginatively democratic gesture of Bill Clinton's choosing Harlem for his ex-presidential offices.... Not shocking, not pointing out its *ex*centricity, yet by no means a gesture of mediation.

THE REAL RETURNS?

In the moments where, despite efforts to remain above the fray, commoner forms of antagonism break out, the book shows spirit. For all its potential pitfalls, the book reveals how all three theorists must/will have tried to confront the important hegemonic success of what Gramsci called the "passive revolutions" of our time (Italian fascism for him; the Reagan Revolution for us)

and the disappointing forms of institutionalized Marxist and democratic theory in Communist governments and Western nations. All three must/will have taken account of the unexpected quarters in which resistance to and for democracy has surfaced: in sexual revolutions, proletarian co-optation, Second- and Third-World conflicts and practices — and psychoanalysis. All three must/will have tried to confront the major theoretical revolutions of our time — the linguistic turn in philosophy and social science and the challenge that psychoanalysis poses to all the major traditions of political and social thought.

The deepest impulse in this book, and what constitutes its significance, then, is precisely what would otherwise be questionable for the Left: its strong stress on *theory* and on *language*. Why make theory the special focus of a Left book? The answer is that events of a theoretical character have posed as many challenges to the post-New Left as the unprecedented historical events of the twentieth century posed to the Old Left (the 60s, the end of the Cold War, the decline of Marxism and Communism's exit from Eastern Europe, along with the recent stunning rise of conservatism in leading democratic nations). Theoretical perplexities have taken precedence in Left debate over the Holocaust, fascism, dictatorships, depressions — the things the older Left easily recognized and oftentimes confronted.

The implication of the book is, then, that the Left must settle with theory before it will be able to confront large-scale social, economic, and political changes now taking place, including the epidemic erosion of democratic principles of governance in the West. The theories whose fine points the authors carefully rehearse interject themselves into established Left theorizing without fully integrating Left theory *per se,* nor negotiating its relation to Left praxis — yet. The real question of the book is whether contemporary theory and methods secure advantages to the Left's commitment to democracy, and if so, how. Or, to the contrary, is there something about the discourse of theory that is blocking the Left's ability to respond to these events?

Thus, when the authors broaden their declaration of purpose to claim they have intended the book to confront what they call "the problem of language," I have to admit I felt like putting the book on pause — given my own long history of working in deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and political theory. It is the hyperinflated status of language and language-like entities that the hard-nosed materialist Old Left has found most difficult to accept in these times, these authors, and these theories.

Modern democracy and progressive social movements often began as manifestoes, declarations (of Independence or the Rights of Man), constitutions, and even moving speeches (the Gettysburg Address, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream"). Few, however, would have predicted the degree to which language would come to dominate politics in the twentieth century, where the first systematic political uses to which it was put were largely anathema to the Left (think Goebbels). The fact of its arrival as a major player on the political stage can no longer be ignored

— from Roosevelt's Fireside chats to spin doctors, from Hitler's Table Talk to Nixon's love-affair with New Criticism, and the inexplicable Teflonicity of the Great Communicator. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* thus might be considered a first staging of the coming of age of a political debate that reflects on the extent to which language now plays so capital a role in the art and performance of politics. What may turn out to be most instructive in this book is what it reveals about the discontents of the Left pluralism it honors and also about the limitations of language as a mode of radical democratic politics.

1. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 193. Subsuquent references will appear parenthetically within the text.

2. Paul Bové has been credited with pronouncing Old Left and Liberal thinkers like Rorty, Taylor, Politt, Ehrenreich, and those who write for *The Nation* "Left Conservatives" because they do not take poststructuralism's critique of transparent communication and unmediated reality into account.

3. I present this in some detail in "Stendhal and the Politics of the Imaginary," in *Approaches to Teaching Stendhal's* The Red and the Black**,** eds. Stirling Haig and Dean de la Motte (New York: PMLA, 1999).

4. I obviously don't agree with this accusation, which Martha Nussbaum makes in "The Professor of Parody," *The New Republic* 22 (February 1999).

5. And Žižek counters with "false disidentification" (103).

6. For me "it" retains overtones of the Freudian Id and the 1950s horror movie. Still, some doctors are now deferring assigning a sex to infants with somewhat ambiguous genitalia. Doubtless Butler's enunciation of the reach of power into gender (from her *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York: Routledge, 1993], 7) has influenced the re-thinking of gender labeling.

7. Butler's "How difficult it is even on the conceptual level to keep the transcendental and the social apart" (146), is followed by, "I would warn against understanding fantasy as something which occurs 'on one level' and social interpellations as something that takes place on 'another level'" (151).

8. Although some readers of Butler liken this process to psychoanalysis, (which also undoes a signifier's inordinate prestige), the two differ quite fundamentally: Butler's signifier is a public labeling, a symbolic naming; psychoanalysis works not with the commonly held symbols, but with the way a singular signifier acquires special, traumatic, and unknowable weight for a subject who suffers its proliferating effects.

9. Make no mistake; the drives postdate the advent of the signifier.

10. In "Dynamic Conclusions" Butler equates Žižek's real with the "truth" that Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy critiqued in Lacan — a "truth" that misrecognizes the crucial medium of its own transmission: "Indeed, this is nowhere more emphatically demonstrated than in Žižek's own work. Consider the use of assertion, of formulas, of anecdote, of dialectical demonstration…there is no way to dissociate truth from the rhetoricity that makes it possible…" (278). Žižek defines the *unmediatable* real as a power to disturb the fiction that social differences are merely symbolic, that is, that they are not laminated with the radically non-symbolic (the real). This is a crucial point of disagreement, marked by Butler's unaccustomed recourse to the *ad hominem*. She absolutely rejects the real as what *drives* language, the domain of power and control; for then the real would be precisely *the* obstacle to the limitless power of language that is the heart of Butler's theory. So when she says, "This metaleptic function of [Žižek's] discourse works most efficiently when it remains undisclosed" (278), her heightened concern is reflected in her attribution to Žižek of a calculating disingenuousness about the ruses of his own speech.

11. She calls Laclau's universalizing the particular the "making of an empire of its local meaning" and echoes Linda Zerilli and Joan Scott's belief that there is "no possibility of extracting the universal claim from the particular" (33).

12. Karl Marx, "Critical Remarks on the Article: 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform,'" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings,* trans. and ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 126.

13. Ibid., italics added.

14. After Rousseau and Hegel, the fundamental principle of *civil*

society is that the collective is responsible for (in all senses of the term) the human. (What Freud and Lacan add is that the non-human edge that *seems* to lie beyond the pale of humanity also inhabits it from within.)

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957). "The cult of mankind ends in the self-enclosed humanism of Comte, and let it be said, of fascism. This kind of humanism we can do without" (50).

16. Ibid., 38-39.

17. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), spoke there of "signs given" (one's controlled and contrived performance) and "signs given off" (inadvertent slips).

18. Butler has been praised precisely for her volatility: see Michael Levinson, "Speaking to Power," *Lingua Franca* (September 1998): 60-68. Levinson notes the "terrible claustrophobia" of Butler's early work, "constructed 'brick by brick' from the theorists whose work she cobbles together.... Butler extracts theory from theory" (63). But he gives her high marks for subsequent books in which she lays bare the processes by which she changed her mind and began rethinking her stances.

19. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "La Nouvelle Héloïse," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), vol. II, *xiv,* II:235.

20. It constitutes something like the total *savoir* that Hegel adumbrated (and which Lacan happened to critique strongly in "Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: Norton, 1977].)

21. Reagan considered the fall of the wall his most important symbolic accomplishment. A chunk of its concrete is housed in his Presidential Library.

22. Laclau notices this pattern of argumentation in Butler. He finds Butler's resistance to his argumentation on the concrete abstract (the universal) to be "a result of her argument being so rooted in the Hegelian way of conceiving the articulation between the abstract and the concrete, which is one not of *contamination* but of reconciliation" (191). But he limits the scope of his characterization to just this one theoretical point.

23. At one point, Butler equates universality with consensus based on local norms that must then be "culturally translated" to become universal (35). This pulls the rug out from under Laclau, who regards the totality as crushing the particular, with the third dimension, the universal — being the particular's only recourse.